CHAPTER 6

THE BETI AND THE PAHOUIN

THE BETI OR BATI

128 /Pp. 1-56 not translated/ In the introductory section devoted to the peopling of the area, we have spoken of the Beti, or Bati, who certainly comprised a large group with many branches. They have been subject to many upheavals and, consequently, it is impossible to determine which of them have remained pure Beti and which—according to G. Tessmann's expression—have become "Pahouinized," and to what extent they have become "Pahouinized." Therefore, we will first devote a short paragraph to the Beti, and then another to the Pahouin /Pahuin/.

In the discussion which follows we will speak first of the populations which the authors have grouped under the name of Beti, and then, imperceptibly, we will move on to the Pahouin, but we are not able to decide exactly where the dividing line should be placed.

173 131 It is certain that the various branches of the Beti, or Bati, spread over a large area. According to the oral traditions of a number of these peoples, their original habitat was north of the Sanaga River, and near its tributary the Mbam /M'Bam/. /Map 1/ A tiny group of these Bati remained there, and they may still be found southwest of Bafia, on the right bank of the Lihoua, a tributary of the Sanaga. Their little territory of barely 20 square kilometers is wedged in between the Yambasa /Yambassa/ in the east, the Lemande in the north, and the Baso in the west and to the south. There are only 800 persons altogether in the villages of Keleng (on the route from Bafia to Ngambe) and the hamlets of Mpouke and Nyambat.

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●167 Others of the Beti remained north of the Sanaga and divided into a scattering of small groups; when the Germans found them they had not united /58/ and were still migrating. They did not become settled until the Babute had been pushed back to their former habitat by the new occupants.

Ngoro
Bafok-Yangafuk

361 The several Ngoro villages are stretched over 70 kilometers of trails. A single one may be found on the right bank of the M'Bam, in the immediate vicinity of Bafia, on the vehicular road. Another is located about 30 kilometers to the southeast, also on the vehicular road but on the left bank of the M'Bam; it is Goura, inhabited by the Ngoro who moved down toward fertile land.

173 The Ngoro say that they descended from the Mangisa a long time ago—perhaps during the time when the latter still lived north of the Sanaga. The traditions of the Ngoro also say that their original ancestor was the same as that of the Betsinga, the Kombe, and the Bundju. Is this myth or history? This extended kinship brings together all the Beti.

The folk history of the Ngoro begins only with the war against the Babute in the last century. At that time they were dispersed, and most of them clustered around the Ngoro River. When attacked by the Babute, those nearest the M'Bam crossed the river and settled among the Bafia, whom they pushed back. /63/ Others, the Yasakunu, were driven all the way back to the Yambasa. The people of the village of Ngoro submitted and were enslaved. They were deported north to Linte and Tibati and south to Goura. /Map 3/

175 At Goura the young slave Ndenge was born of a Ngoro father and a
● 167 Djanti mother, both deported there. As an adult, Ndenge enlisted in the native army of the Germans and attracted the attention of his superiors by his intelligence and zeal. They assigned him the task of reuniting all the exiles, and little by little turned over to him all those who were freed through their wars—first the exiles found among the Yambasa, then those among the Bafia. These migrations are the explanation for the wide scattering of Ngoro villages and for the frequent moves. Fortunately, the appearance of the cacao tree has begun to stabilize a number of these settlements.

THE BAFÖK-YANGAFUK

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Location: widely scattered, to be found in several settlements sometimes very far from each other
Between 11°15 and 12°30 long.
and 4°30 and 5°50 north lat.

361 a minimum of 64 in the former subdivision of Chinchoua and a
614 maximum of 1,000 in Kyé-Nyé Canton, (Oyem District), and in the villages situated on Bitam-Minvoul. Thus the reality and effectiveness of the clan groupings are very different according to different sections of the Fang country. Hence, it can be understood that attempts to renew the clans could only take place in regions where such a grouping still has vitality. It should also be noted that the highest average volume by clan occurs in the regions where the Fang population is greatest and where the demographic
184 situation is the most favorable. The centers of vitality are located in in the Woleu-N'Tem [area] (a large part of the district of Mitzic being excluded) and in a small zone in the neighborhood of Libreville. These two regions compete to extend their influence over the whole of the Fang country, the rivalry appearing in the elections when a candidate from Libreville is opposed by one from the Upper Gabon (legislative elections of 1951). And it can be understood that the Fang country as a whole does not show everywhere the same degree of change in the traditional social structure nor the same capacity to adapt itself to present-day conditions.

●167 By transferring to a map the groupings estimated in each of the
178 districts, other facts become clear. The direction in which the dis-
614 persal took place becomes manifest. Thus the Effak coming from the frontier of the Cameroons passed by the outskirts of Spanish Guinea to reach the coast near Cocobeach and Libreville; the Angonâmvé coming from the Woleu-N'Tem reached the Ogooué (they were found in the section of N'Djolé at the beginning of this century), then Lower Gabon beyond Lambaréné, etc. Moreover, some groupings did not spread out and were found only in relatively definite regions: the Oyèk in Spanish Guinea and in the French districts south of this territory (Médouneu, Cocobeach, and Libreville), the Kojé at Bitam and Oyem, the Ožip only at Oyem, etc. Finally, certain minor groupings existed only on the frontiers of the Fang country and had an independent existence. The Yengwi of Oyem remember that one of their fragments emigrated towards Kango (without knowing either the exact name or place), but none of the groupings taken by the census in this district claim a common

167 origin with the Yengwi of the Woleu-N'Tem. Thus [88] this last
178 link has disappeared — the only link observed at the beginning of
619 this century by an administrator who claimed there was an "extreme" breakup of groupings which were scattered "hundreds of kilometers from one another." (1)

1. Captain Maignan, "Etudes sur le Pays Pahouin [Studies of the Pahuin Country]," dated 1912 and published in the Bulletin de la Société des Recherches Congolaises, 14, 1931.

This fragmentation and entanglement of Fang groupings can be explained by the recent character of the migrations across Gabon and the search for economically advantageous spots, and by the pacification which makes the cohesion of numerically strong groupings no longer necessary. These were also noted by the first observers: Maignan speaks of "families camped near the Ivindo" who "have felt the need to unite in order to defend themselves from the attacks of their neighbors and who have remained united, forming uninterrupted lines of villages." (2) Finally, the role of

2. Op. cit.

the administration must be stressed; a policy of recruitment in order to have manpower at hand in the administrative centers; the reaction of certain groupings which consisted in running away from administrative ascendency ("as soon as a position is created in a populated region, a vacuum occurs in the twinkling of an eye around it," writes Périquet in a Mission report) (3); a po[illegible] of stabilizing

3. Captain Périquet, Mission d'étude du chemin de fer du nord [Mission to Study the Northern Railroad], 1910-1911.

the population for purposes of road building and regrouping of villages (1930). The nomadism of the Fang has been the despair of the

167 administrators. But outside these most evident causes, others of
178 an internal nature giving rise to this fragmentation must be con-
619 sidered. We must retain the idea of a maximum capacity of village grouping which we will enlarge upon in the study of the social structure.

The successive ruptures of the groupings and the multiple migrations make it difficult to understand precisely the nature of the present-day groupings scattered throughout the Fang country. As for the several large groups usually recognized, we have suggested that they were migratory groups which moved at different periods after having been subject to different cultural influences, and having been the first to have occupied the Fang country in Gabon (which would explain the attempts of earlier observers to define a division into "lands"); and we have shown how their significance has become blurred. (See pp. 4-8 .) We have the proof that these names are subsequent to [89] the tribal and clan names (at least those of the oldest clans). In the Ožip there are collected groupings calling themselves Ntumu, Fang, and Maké (1); Tessman places the Ntumu and Fang in two different

1. Tradition des Ožip [Tradition of the Ožip], Administrative Archives of Oyem.

groups, the Ndôg and the Bökwé, (2) According to our investiga-

2. Tessmann, op. cit.

tion (confirmed by various observers), it is a question of a Ndôg tribe of which the Bökwé (a corruption of the word Ebikwe) are a clan. Curault gives another example of this: at the beginning of the century a tribe, Okana, at N'Djolé had "produced" clans called Bétsi, Maké, and Nzaman. (3)

3. Captain Curault, "Monographie du secteur de N'Djolé au Gabon [Monograph on the Section of N'Djolé in Gabon]," op. cit.

967 If we go by the names taken in the census, we note that
178 names of different formation designate groupings that are apparent-
619 ly identical: some of the names begin with Yé or a consonant, the others begin with Esa (ésé, isi) or Eba (ébi), the names in the form of ésà or éba being the most numerous. The word ye (meaning "valley") is accompanied by a qualifier often referring to a plant, an animal, or a natural phenomenon (yé-ngwi (the boar), yé-mvâg (the rain), etc.). The prefix ésa or éba (meaning "begetter") is used to designate the posterity of a more or less remote human ancestor We must therefore surmise that in this last case we are dealing with names designating more recent groupings of secondary formation: clans and lines of descent, The other names refer to ancient groupings whose origin is legendary, who in the past were localized, and who split up and scattered due to multiple migrations; that is, they refer to tribes. The first to observe the Fang, Trilles and Martrou, are positive about these facts. So are the tribal traditions: that of the Yénzǒk has preserved the memory of the first division into four clans which occurred after crossing the Sanaga River (4) (principal halting place of the

4. Traditions des Yéndzǒk [Traditions of the Yéndzǒk], Administrative Archives of Ebolowa, the French Cameroons.

migrations which distributed the Fang throughout the South Cameroons and Gabon). Each important halting place of the migrations accentuated the fragmentation and created new pre-eminences. Such is the case of the Yénzǒk. The crossing of the Sanaga led to a division of the groupings which are still called Yénzǒk; the crossing of the N'Tem (which gives access to Gabon) resulted in the establishment of the large Effak grouping, [90] which divided to reach the coast in subgroupings who call themselves only Effak. (1)

1. Table of the "tribes and subtribes" set up by the Fang of Lower Gabon for the Commission of the Historical Investigation of Libreville.

167 178 69 Relations between groupings resulting from such successive ruptures have fallen off and finally disappeared in many cases. This is because of the conflicts which were often the origin of the fragmentation, because of the distance between fragments, and because of the situation resulting from colonial occupation which brought about peace so that "strong tribal solidarity" was no longer essential. (2) Other reasons are control of collective movement

2. L. Martrou, "La langue Fan et ses dialectes [Fang Language and Dialects]," Journal de la Société Africanistes, Vol. 6, p. 2, 1936.

and establishment in the interior of administrative districts which have finally brought about very localized associations. A proof of this falling off is found by comparing the tribal compositions established by L. Martrou (on the Ogooué in the first decade of the century), by those responsible for the movement of clan regrouping (in Upper Gabon after 1945), and by the investigators of the "Commission of Historical Investigation" (in Lower Gabon in 1949). These documents show great divergences which can be accounted for by local circumstances. Taking advantage of this confusion the leaders of the clan movement have been able to set up regroupings which are very questionable from the point of view of clan logic. In addition, the fact that the groupings in the course of their migrations have changed their names (affirmed by L. Martrou, Maignan, and L. Mba) (3) tends to accentuate this con-

3. L. Martrou, op. cit.; Captain Maignan, op. cit.; and L. Mba, "Essai de droit coutumier pahouin [Essay on Pahouin Common Law]," Recherches Congolaises, 25, 1938.

fusion. It can therefore be understood that the limited and definitely located groupings have been for many years the only ones that are truly effective — and, at the same time, which enjoy a kind of independence.

161 attributed to the optimism of this observer who "seems to have been conservative." (3) G. Sautter thinks that such a population,

3. G. Sautter, "Essai sur le peuplement et l'habitat au Woleu-Ntem" [Essay on the Population and Habitat in Woleu-Nt'Tem], Cahiers d'Outre-Mer, 14, April-June, 1951.

"itself deficient" (for causes which appear in part of a natural order since they occur "from one end to the other of the equatorial forest bloc"), has been sorely tried by endemic diseases and famine as well as by emigration and recruiting. Stabilization, which has asserted itself during the last two decades along with the equipment and enrichment of the region, is still tenuous. Because of this G. Sautter will not risk making any forecast on the future evolution of the Woleu-N'Tem population. He recognizes that the Fang of this region are a "flourishing population when compared to their congeners of the Ivindo, the Ogooué, and the coast, who are in a far worse position."

The fragility of this equilibrium was apparent at the time of the "war effort." The political report of Woleu-N'Tem (1944) pays particular attention to the problem of depopulation. It shows [165] a large excess of deaths over births (22.1 percent versus 15.9), and it stresses the serious recrudescence of the migratory move- • [167] ment — an official estimate gives 4,500 adult men (that is more than 20 percent of the adult male population) who at that time had gone to Spanish Guinea. That is to say, that the results obtained since 1930 by [our] population policy have remained eminently precarious. While still one of the most vigorous ethnic groups of Gabon, the Fang have a handicap which makes them sensitive to any critical situation, as was apparent during the last years of the war. There is no medical report that [93] still boasts, as did the early observers, of the robustness and prolicacy of the Pahouin.

162 With the help of precise investigations made in Woleu-N'Tem, we have been able to study the structure of the Fang population in this relatively favorable region. The most apparent fact is the

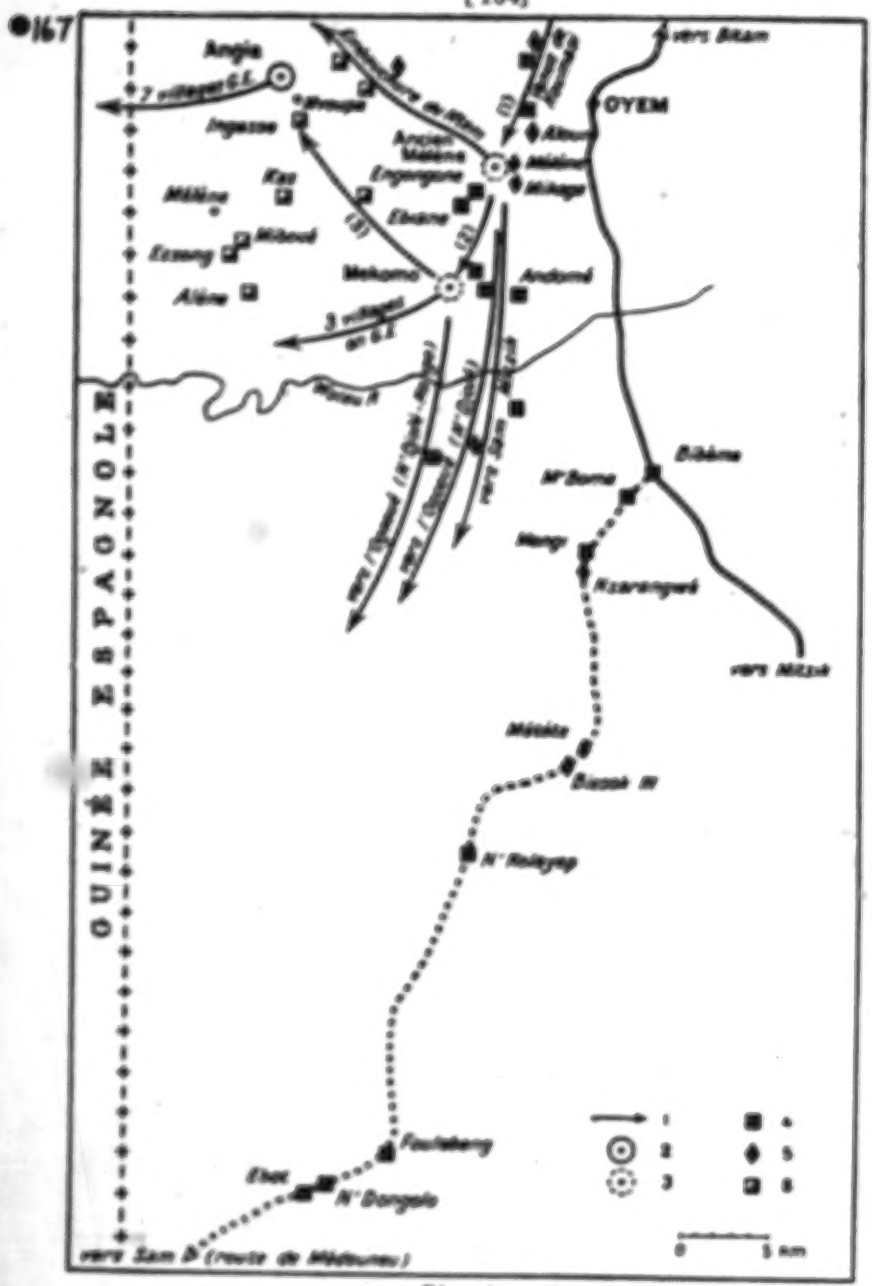

Fig. 4

Dispersal of the Yengwi around Oyem.
(Esɔnɔ́ Angɔ́ lineage)

Legend: 1. Important displacements; 2. Center of Dispersal; 3. Vanished Center of dispersal; 4. Group of Mbomɔmvɔgɔ Esɔnɔ; 5. Groups of Naim Esɔnɔ; 6. Groups of Efwana Mbomɔmvɔgɔ.

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Bingo) and possess his secret, they killed him and took the green stone, the green stone he would have left us. Since then men from beyond the mountains possess the riches of the earth, but we have kept the laws of Bingo...."

wealth, they are mitâgõ, those who count. They have even been proclaimed by mythology. They have the physical appearance of ghosts, and they have at their disposal all the goods accumulated in the country of the ancestors. One can see therefore the powerful impression made by the arrival of the white man who was rich in merchandise, and the value, reinforced by the whole meaning of the myth, placed on this wealth. At the time of the clan regrouping movement, certain teachings in the form of question and answer continued to associate the two terms, power of the white man's example and pursuit of riches:

"--What life should we lead?
--We should lead the European life.
--What is the example we should give to lead the European life?
--We should work in order to earn money...." (4)

4. Cahier des réunions [Notebook of Gatherings], Yémisèm of Oyem.

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At the beginning of this chapter we stressed the attraction of the economically strong centers -- the coast, the Lower Ogooué, Spanish Guinea. A map of the migrations makes [158] them appear like meeting points. At first the Fang settled in the outskirts of these centers or attracted the trading stations to themselves with a feeling of real appropriation. Du Chaillu and Cureau observed this phenomenon, the former by showing how "having become the white man of such-and-such a chief, " he "obtained well-being and security" but was obliged to give

8: Bennett D-5 (ca. 1898) 1899 FH9 Fang FH9

ETHNOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON THE FANG.

By Albert L. Bennett, M.D., F.R.S.

[WITH PLATES XIV TO XVII.]

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I HAVE the honour to come before you this evening, for the purpose of making known to you the result of my observations while dwelling and labouring among that great and powerful tribe of the Bantu family, known as Fang. In presenting this paper, I do so fully aware of its deficiency; but the information obtained from natives was never accepted nor recorded as authentic, until it had been frequently confirmed by others. I also desire to acknowledge my indebtedness to the Council of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, for sending me a copy of *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, a book which ever proved an invaluable guide and help to me while living among the Fang, and studying their customs.

I.—*Introduction.*

The large tribe of people known as Fang inhabiting a considerable portion of the French Congo was first described by Du Chaillu.

Records show that in 1867 the French naval officer Admiral Fleuriot de Langle placed the number of Fang within French territory at nearly sixty thousand. Since that time this powerful tribe has rapidly increased in numbers. Between the Ogowe River and the Gaboon, the Fang may be counted by thousands,

8: Bennett D-5 (ca. 1898) 1899 FH9 Fang FH9

and like a resistless army they are steadily approaching the coast, building towns and displacing weaker tribes. That fine race of people, the Mpôngwes, often spoken of as the "aristocratic tribe," and ranking first in the scale of civilisation above all other tribes in the French Congo, is rapidly dying out, and they are already being supplanted even at Gaboon by the migratory Fang.

The Bulu people inhabiting a portion of the German sphere of influence in West Africa are without doubt very closely related to, if not a direct offshoot from, the Fang; their customs are identical and their language so markedly similar that a person who is able to speak Bulu is readily understood by the Fang. The first day of my arrival among the Fang, after residing in Bululand, I was able to make known the reason for my coming and to ask and answer ordinary questions. While visiting on a small island called Nenge-nenge in the Nkomo River, a very old Fang man told me as follows: When a lad his grandfather had told him that, a long time ago, many of his tribe "changed their towns." These people first travelled far in canoes, and then after journeying for very many days through the forest, they "stopped walking and made new towns," and they did not return. My informant's father had told him later more about these people; they had been heard from, and their long absence from the original tribe had so changed them that "they spoke new words" (a new language).

Examples could be given almost without limit of the great similarity in the language as spoken by the Bulu and Fang. A few will suffice; and I will select from the proverbs of the people which are also identical. Tell a Bulu man to hurry with his work, he will often reply, "*Alu da dayi bé' nask?*" (Will one day eat an elephant?). The Fang speak the same proverb thus: "*Alu awoti bé' nask?*" Again, the Bulu use the words *Mélu mpsu* (the days that are past), *Mélu ase* (the days that are to come), *Mélu nsasa* (all the days). These sayings and numerous similar ones are in daily use among the Fang, the words used and the idiom being almost identically the same as in Bulu. I have wondered if the account given me by the old Fang man at Nenge-nenge about the people who years ago "changed their towns," might not be of more than passing interest as touching the genesis of the Bulu.

The Fang people are spread over an immense area of country, and when questioned regarding their numbers they usually reply, "There are Fang and Fang; if you walk and sleep in towns and towns for many *mvoos* (months) you will find Fang." In the future it will be found that in the ethnography of equatorial Africa the Fang will hold a very important place. As before stated they are unquestionably closely related to the Bulu, and Compiègne recognised a marked similarity between them and the Oyelo, Monbuttu and Nyamnyam people. There are several scattered tribes of dwarfs among the Fang. Five of these pigmies live within two miles of my station, and they tell me that more of their people will soon "move their towns" and come to live on the banks of the Nkomo river. The Fang people look on the pigmies as a very clever and superior people, and not without good reason. An old headman told me that the *esom ngui* (dwarfs) first